

Believe — Then the Water

*A reply to “Being Protestant in the Secular Netherlands” — for a young sister
in Utrecht*

Jørn André Halseth



Dear Sister in Utrecht

This letter replies to the video [Being Protestant in the Secular Netherlands — Young & Faithful](#) by DW Euromaxx, the portrait of a 22-year-old Protestant student in Utrecht. Every quotation of hers below is word-for-word from that film. Where the letter speaks of infant baptism, it addresses the practice of her church tradition, not words she spoke on camera.

First, your courage honored me. With only three in ten of your generation in the Netherlands professing any faith, there you are: up on Sunday mornings while the city sleeps, unembarrassed, telling a camera what it means to belong to Christ's people. That is no small thing. It is the very thing Peter asked of us: to be ready to give an answer.

You identified your own foundation clearly and correctly:

I joined a Christian student's club, where I study the most important basis of Protestantism and Christianity itself: the Bible. We meet in small groups to study Bible passages and discuss together what they might mean.

— *A young sister in Utrecht*, [Being Protestant in the Secular Netherlands](#) —
DW

That principle—the Book as our basis, tested in open discussion—is not merely Protestant heritage; it *is* the Reformation. Luther’s wager was that any tradition, however ancient or beloved, must bow to what is written. So, I offer the question that principle demands, with full respect: your tradition baptizes infants. You say religion has been part of your life “since childhood,” which in the Dutch Reformed world almost always begins at a font, with an infant who cannot yet believe. Put that practice on the table at your student club, open the Book, and read what it actually says. Every baptism recorded or commanded in the New Testament follows a single order:

Mark 16:16, WEB · He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned.

Believe, then be baptized. This order is not mere decoration; it is doctrine. Observe how it holds through the first baptisms in history, on the day the church was born:

Acts 2:38-41, WEB · Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all who are far off, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.” With many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized. There were added that day about three thousand souls.

Notice verse 39—“the promise is to you and to your children”—as it is the verse most often quoted over the font. Read it in full: the promise is to the children on the same terms as to the fathers and to those far off—“as many as the Lord our God will call.” And verse 41 tells us exactly who was baptized that day: “those who gladly received his word.” Not one infant is named in that verse, or anywhere else in the New Testament’s baptismal accounts. When Samaria believed, Luke records the range precisely:

Acts 8:12, WEB · But when they believed Philip preaching good news concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Men and women. Believers. That is the whole census. And the epistles explain why this order cannot be reversed: because faith is not the decoration of baptism, but the instrument working within it.

Colossians 2:12, WEB · having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

An infant can be washed, but an infant cannot answer. Scripture's own definition of baptism—the answer of a good conscience—is something only a believing heart can give.

First Peter 3:21, WEB · This is a symbol of baptism, which now saves you—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Perhaps your catechism will answer: *but we sprinkle, and the prophets promised sprinkling*. Then read one more verse with your study group, and watch it resolve the whole question:

Hebrews 10:22, WEB · let's draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and having our body washed with pure water,

Two verbs stand in a single sentence. The *heart* is sprinkled — God's own priestly act, in a place no minister's hand can reach — and the *body* is washed; in the Greek they are two different words, *rhantizō* for the sprinkling and *louō* for the bathing of the whole person. The promised sprinkling has already been done by Another. The body's part is to go down into the water and come up. That whole watery thread — the Spirit over the deep, Noah, the Red Sea, the Jordan, and why the font is not the promised sprinkling — is walked slowly in [Through the Waters](#).

But what of Jesus and the children? That scene is cited for the font more than any other, so read what he actually did:

Mark 10:14-16, WEB · But when Jesus saw it, he was moved with indignation, and said to them, "Allow the little children to come to me! Don't forbid them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Most assuredly I tell you, whoever will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child, he will in no way enter into it." He took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

He took them in his arms and blessed them. He did not baptize them, and no apostle after him ever did. Children belong in his arms—always, unconditionally welcomed.

Baptism belongs at the other end of his sentence: "make disciples... baptizing them." A blessing is for the carried; baptism is for the persuaded.

I write this not against your church, but as the most Protestant invitation I know: do to your own traditions what Luther did to his. If, Bible in hand, you find that baptism is the believer's answer, then a step of obedience awaits that no one could take for you as a child. It is not a repetition of anything; it is the first one that is truly yours. I have written a small book that walks through every baptism in the New Testament, verse by verse: [Believe and Be Baptized](#). You closed your film by asking, "What role does religion play in your life?" Here is my answer: none—a Person plays it. Come and see.

How this was made

This is the author's own work. It was composed with [junifye](#) and an AI assistant, drawing its Scripture and original-language work (Greek, Hebrew, cross-references) from [Darash](#) (Hebrew *darash*, “to seek, inquire, study”), a tool and reference work for the Bible in its original languages.

A gift of support — [Stripe](#)



Scan to read this book online